

LESSON 1

MAN'S GUILT

THE HUMAN CONDITION

If there is any experience common to man in our age, it is a feeling of guilt.

We may feel we have neglected our family, that we have been ungrateful to our parents, that we have been too ambitious at the expense of our friends, that we have failed those who depend on us, or that our thoughts and actions have not been morally upright. These anxieties lead to a feeling of guilt. In its extreme form this deepened guilt may result in mental illness.

This guilt is the pervading theme of the Bible.

Psychologists also recognize man's affliction with guilt. They declare that it has to do with one's failure to come to terms with his place in the world. For the writers of the Bible, however, the cause of this guilt lies in a different direction. In the Bible, God as the creator is Lord over all His creation, and man as a created being is dependent upon Him and ideally lives in accord with His will. If man chooses to live his own way rather than God's, then he is guilty — a sinner. Rather than worshiping God, the Creator, he has turned to worship the created. Paul speaks of certain Greeks "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever" (Romans 1:25).*

MAN WITHOUT MEANING

From a biblical standpoint, man cannot escape his guilt until he accepts who he is, that he is being created by God, and then comes to trust God to give meaning and direction to life. Many

* Read the text of all scriptural references. All quotations in this lesson are taken from the King James Version. For those using other versions, the words may differ but the meanings are the same.

people have attempted to find the meaning of life in some other philosophy than the one provided by the Scriptures.¹

Jesus, in His parable about the prodigal son, illustrates the disaster which results when man attempts to order his own life (Luke 15:11-32). In this parable, the younger son requests of his father that part of the inheritance which he considered rightfully his. The father grants the request. So the son goes out to lead a life of his own, apart from the rule of his father. But life as he decided to live it turns out for the worse. In his despair he recognizes his guilt: that he is a sinner and has violated the love of his father.

Today, men find themselves in the same predicament. They have decided that there is a better life than that provided by God the Father. But when they set out on their own, they find that the life they have decided upon is meaningless. Too often, they turn to human alternatives or give up altogether — feeling lost, without purpose, without hope.

SIN IS UNIVERSAL

Yet, the Bible teaches that man alone cannot work out the problem of sin; he cannot by himself find the way to fulfillment; he cannot achieve his true spiritual purpose alone. In the long ago, an inspired Old Testament prophet wrote, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon predicted the final outcome of men who believe they can live fully, meaningfully, and righteously apart from the will of their Creator in these words: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Guilt is a universal human condition. No man can attain a state of righteousness before God on his own merit or morality. The Word of God declares there is "none" righteousness, not even

¹ The comments of *Time* magazine's theatre critic in writing about the plays "Gideon" and "J. B.", for example, point out man's failure: "They deny that the end of man is to glorify God and seem to agree that man must express, sanction, and glorify himself. Paradoxically, the denial and doubt of God have led not to the affirmation of man but to his greater despair."

one "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:12, 23).

Thus, Jesus came to earth to do for man what he could not do for himself: save himself from his sins and guilt. The Lord came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Man's estranged condition is described as alienation or separation from God. The separation is due to man's sins. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isaiah 59:2).

ATTAINING FREEDOM FROM SIN

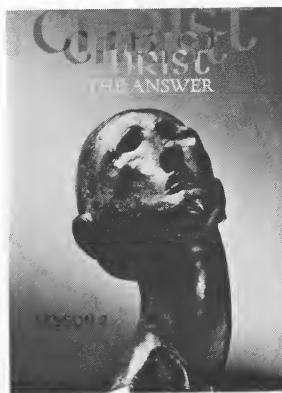
It is precisely because of the universality of sin that the powerful and redeeming message of Christ has been embodied in the gospel and addressed to "all" persons (Matthew 28:19). All must be taught because all have sinned, because all stand guilty before God, and because all need the forgiveness that is in Christ — the only forgiveness that can bring enduring peace and joy to the human heart. Jesus inaugurated this new era of forgiveness and its freedom from guilt — with the establishment of his kingdom, or church, upon the earth in the first century A.D.

When one learns what God has done on his behalf, his guilt becomes even deeper, for God has acted and man has not responded. God's acts of love are first of all known in our daily sustenance. The prodigal received his livelihood from his father, but squandered it as he pleased rather than to bring honor to his father. To live life as one pleases is to be ungrateful. This was the sin of Israel. God had given her a land which flowed with milk and honey, but she played the prodigal, living as she pleased and worshiping other gods (Hosea 11). In like manner, God has provided us many things, and in our refusal to recognize our dependence upon Him we are like the nine lepers who did not return to thank Jesus that they had been made clean (Luke 17:11-19). But God's supreme act of love is the gift of His Son who died on the cross in our behalf (I Corinthians 15:3). If we fail to respond to His love by acknowledging that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8), our ingratitude is of the deepest kind.

DESPAIR OR SALVATION?

We may think that in living life on our own terms we will find contentment, but in the end the result is guilt and despair (Romans 6:12-23). Those who live life in order to fulfill their desires end up by becoming slaves to those desires. A case in point is the man who becomes a slave to alcohol. As an alcoholic, his life is not fulfilled but destroyed. In contrast, those who become the slaves of Jesus Christ find life by losing it in service to Him (Matthew 10:39). The result is that they obtain the free gift of God which is "eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Many of us carry around a feeling of guilt though we are not always sure why. The Bible declares that it is because we are not living in obedience to God. This is to be guilty before God. In other words, we are sinners and judgment awaits our guilt. (See Acts 17:30-32; Romans 14:10-12; II Corinthians 5:10).



YOUR NEXT LESSON . . .

Christ The Answer deals with the divine response to the human plight of guilt and how the benefits of Christ's sacrifice can be gained by each person.

LESSON ONE: REVIEW

The questions below are based on the following passages in the Word of God: Romans 1:16-2:10; Luke 15:11-32; Hosea 11; Luke 17:11-19; Romans 6:12-23; Acts 17:22-34. Read each passage carefully and thoroughly before completing the exercise. The questions are designed for brief answers — sometimes only one word, or a few words, or a sentence at the most.

1. The righteousness of God is revealed in what?

2. Through what means should the Gentiles have come to know about God?

3. List at least two things that indicate these Gentiles worshiped the created instead of the Creator.

4. These Gentiles realized they were worthy of what punishment for their sins?

5. In Jesus' parable, the younger son left home and engaged in what kind of life?

6. The father in this parable represents whom?

7. As the wayward son was approaching, what did the father do to show his love?

8. Who expressed a resentful attitude toward his father's action?

9. Did Israel realize the love and compassion God had bestowed upon her?

10. What were some of Israel's sins?

11. The Israelites were guilty because they had failed to exalt whom?

12. What had God done to deserve the obedience of Israel?

13. How does God's way differ from man's?

14. What attitude is commended in the account of the ten lepers?

15. What similarity is there between the nine lepers and Israel of old?

16. When were the Romans made free from sin?

17. What is the destiny of those who remain enslaved to unlawful desires?

18. What precaution had the Athenians taken to assure that they would not neglect any god?

19. Who is subject to the law of repentance?

20. What is the proof of a coming judgment?

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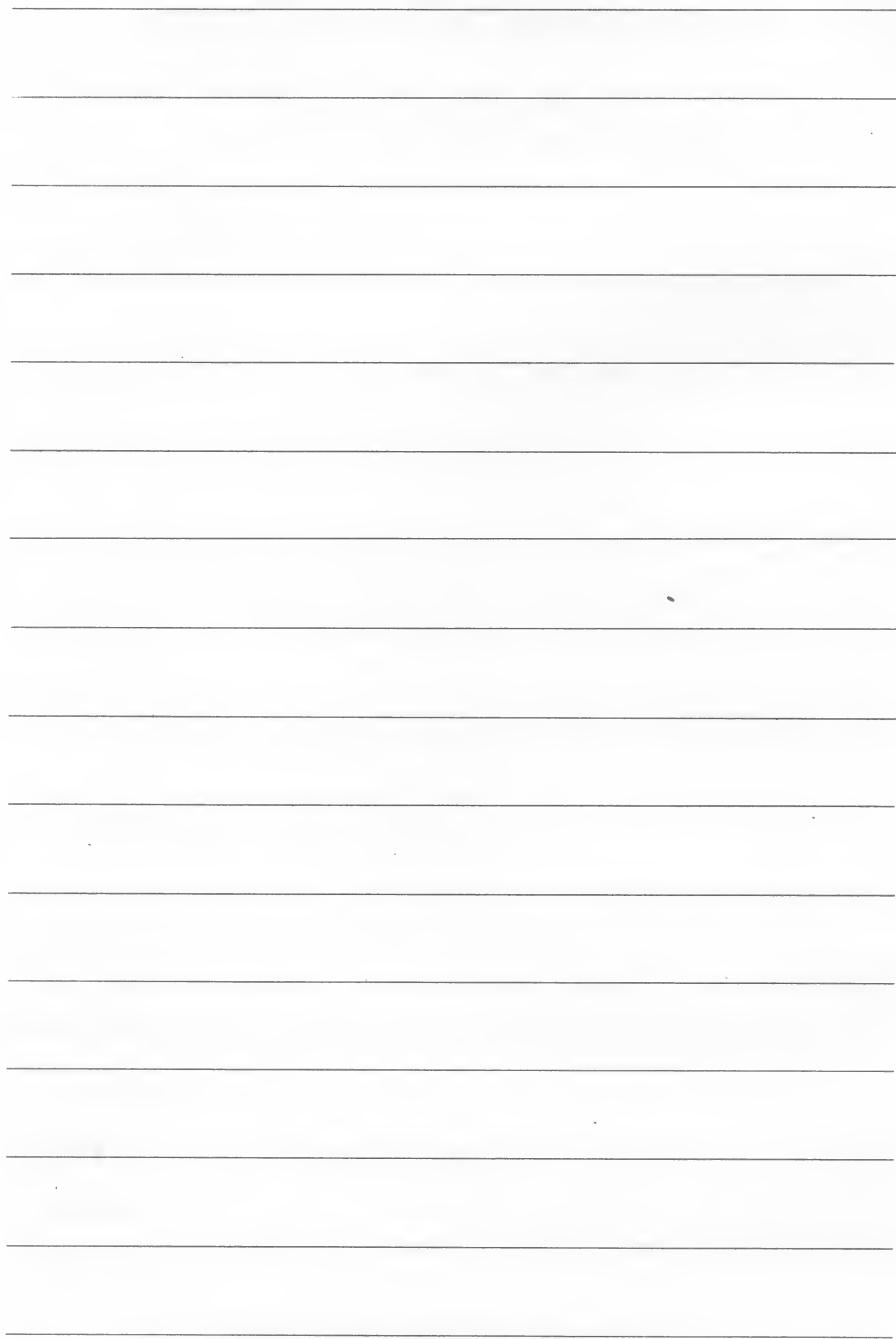
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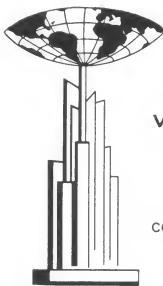
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